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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000780

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SUBJECT: MULUZI/MBEKI VISIT POSTPONEMENT

REF: LILONGWE 406

Classified By: JOSEPH G. SULLIVAN FOR REASONS 1.5 B/D

1.(c) Stephen Nkomo, Governor of Matabeleland South and brother of the late Joshua Nkomo, passed away last weekend, was declared a national hero by the ZANU/PF Politburo, and will be buried at heroes' acre on Friday April 25. Typically, President Mugabe would speak at the occasion and might visit the Nkomo family prior to the event. Such a death does not typically mean the cancellation of all other activities. Indeed, Angolan Foreign Minister Joao Miranda arrived April 22 at the invitation of Foreign Minister Mudenge and has a very full program April 23, reportedly to discuss the SADC task force meeting scheduled for early May. The ZCTU work stayaway also began fairly successfully today April 23 and is scheduled to run through, at least, April 25.

2.(c) Comment: While the GOZ has a plausible excuse for postponing the Muluzi/Mbeki visit, we would not be surprised if the GOZ was anxious to avoid the pressure they feared might be coming their way. Certainly, the GOZ has been using delay and obfuscation with respect to the SADC Organ of Consultation and the SADC Task Force visits. Even, Mudenge's invitation to Miranda "to prepare the SADC Task Force visit" appears an attempt to gain control of the agenda of the task force visit in contradiction to prior efforts of SADC Ambassadors here to plan a balanced program. We would also not be surprised to see the Zimbabweans seek to sow seeds of discord between the Angolan SADC Presidency and Presidents Muluzi and Mbeki.

3.(c) Comment continued: President Mugabe's professed readiness, in a friendly televised interview, to meet MDC leader Tsvangirai was conditioned very carefully on Tsvangirai's willingness to accept Mugabe as President.

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Mugabe also hinted vaguely in that interview at his possible willingness to consider retirement, but we read these comments as designed to diminish pressure on his regime. Nonetheless, we believe that the Muluzi/Mbeki initiative is the best current hope for changing the equation and hope that these leaders will stick to their intentions and press hard when they come.

SULLIVAN